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Pharmacy and medicine students' views on an inter-professional simulated prescribing and dispensing activity

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Background: Close collaboration between GPs and pharmacists is required to minimise relatively common medication and dispensing errors (FIP, 2015). In December 2015, an investment of GBP2.6 million enabled recruitment of pharmacists to work in GP practices in Northern Ireland. Despite the need to work collaboratively, medical and pharmacy training is often unilateral (Dornan *et al.*, 2009). An innovative inter-professional education (IPE) activity for 4th year medical and 3rd year pharmacy students was developed, aiming to develop the knowledge of their roles in prescribing, dispensing and patient education. Inter-professional student teams had to clinically assess, diagnose, prescribe, and dispense medication(s) for a simulated patient (in a simulated general practice and pharmacy setting).

Method: Four focus groups of six-eight medical and pharmacy students explored their attitudes towards the IPE activity. Three of the focus groups were completed immediately after the activity, the other one a week later. Questions posed aimed to explore the impact of the simulated learning activity on students' attitudes towards IPE and ascertain student perceptions on the value of this simulated learning activity and how well it supported their core teaching and mentorship skills. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed iteratively using template analysis. Ethical approval for this study was obtained.

Results: Analysis of the data yielded four main themes of participant's experiences: 1) IPE simulation activity: unlocking new learning experiences; 2) Patient centred practice: a shared understanding; 3) Professional skills: explored and shared; and 4) Professional roles: a journey of discovery, respect and stereotypes.

For many medical students, this was their first opportunity to appreciate the dispensing process and the continuous focus on patient safety came as a surprise. Pharmacy students praised the holistic approach medical students applied to their consultations.

"...it's opened my eyes to how patient-centred the dispensing and counselling really is." (Female, Med FG2)

"Something I thought was good was with our patient they weren't just asking about drug therapy. They gave other options. Our medical student suggested yoga and that sort of thing, lifestyle things that could help, something other than drugs." (Female, Pharm FG2)

Conclusion: Students broadened their knowledge of each other's expertise in skills and clinical roles while working together, and valued the opportunity to strengthen co-operations with their future colleagues with the shared goal of improving patient care.

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Using a private social media platform with pharmacy students

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Background: Although mainstream social media has found application for teaching and learning, a significant barrier was identified for pharmacy education (Brown & Addison, 2015). Students are concerned about the impact on their digital identity and are reticent to engage. The project aimed to overcome this barrier by implementing a private social media platform.

Method: The overall methodology was to determine if a safe community space could be established for pharmacy students and staff to engage outside of the classroom. The app was co-designed with students, coded and trialled in March 2016 with a 2nd year programme unit comprising 135 students and two academics.

Results: The app enabled a vibrant community with over 60% of the student group participating, with most students posting anonymously. Students were able to post questions, and academics used surveys and competitions to interact with the cohort.

Initially, the questions posted by students were answered by academics. As time progressed, these questions were increasingly answered by other students.

Following the trial, quantitative evaluation was conducted using an on-line questionnaire, including both Likert items and free-text questions. The results revealed that students thought that the app facilitated a community of students and academics working together, and that the app was useful to support their learning. It also revealed that academics' involvement is a key ingredient.